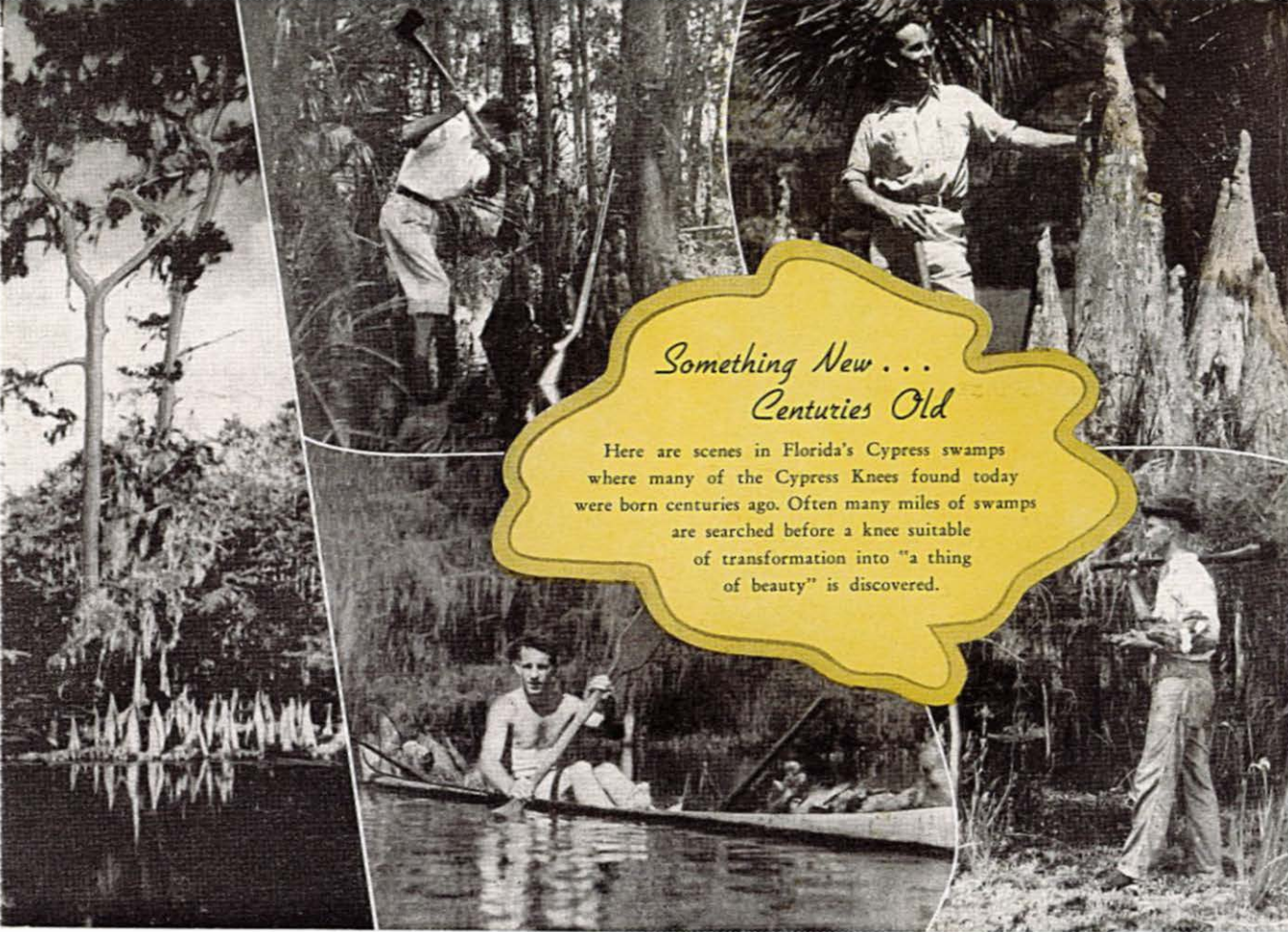
Masterpieces of Nature...



Something New . . . Centuries Old

Here are scenes in Florida's Cypress swamps where many of the Cypress Knees found today were born centuries ago. Often many miles of swamps are searched before a knee suitable of transformation into "a thing of beauty" is discovered.

CYPRESS KNEES

by

THOMAS GASKINS

Originator of Cypress Knee Products

PALMDALE, FLORIDA

If you could own Niagara Falls, or a glorious sunset in a permanent form, that would be wonderful. To a few people, owning a rare and beautiful Cypress Knee is something like that, insofar as thrilling pleasure and satisfaction are concerned. To many people, of course, who never see the beauty of Nature's Wonders, a rare and beautiful Cypress Knee is just so much stove wood. Beauty is as one sees it and understands it and it cannot be measured in pounds or inches, or dollars and cents.

Offspring of the aristocratic Cypress Tree (Taxodium Distichum), the Cypress Knee is nature's outstanding example of differentness. Something like an ever blooming Orchid, denizen of the swamp, an individual natural formation of wood that cannot be duplicated. Mysterious, beautiful, artistic, exotic, sad, gay, graceful; more varied than people. Man can build planes, skyscrapers and atomic bombs, but man cannot duplicate a Cypress Knee because a Cypress Knee lived and grew and formed during hundreds and thousands of years. No piece of literature can give a true picture of the mysterious wood because each piece is so different from another. Dictionaries and encyclopedias give dissimilar definitions. If you have a conception of what the Cypress Knee is like, you are right, but at the same time you are wrong, because some are far different from any you have seen. Except for the generally straight shape, the mold was broken when each one was made. Your conception is correct for those you have seen, but does not fit many you have not seen.

Some Cypress Knees belong in a swank hotel lobby. Then there are those magnificient, impossible shapes that belong in a museum to be preserved for posterity so future generations may see what used to be many centuries ago. Another piece fits in your garden or den, porch or living room. Or perhaps you are a collector of the unusual and artistic, if so, I have pieces you will treasure. It is possible, too, that you are one who could wear a certain piece in the form of a pin or brooch. Your imagination plus my imagination can create something for you that will bring pleasure and enjoyment nothing else can supply, and worth far beyond the cost of a few dollars. I shall be happy to try to find the piece you will like.

SINCE I am the originator of the art of crafting unique products from this natural world-wonder and have spent many years of intense study, observation and experimentation with this little known marvel of the forests, I feel about three-fourths qualified to write a few words on the subject.

The Cypress Knee is part of the root of the Cypress Tree. It lives only in the Southern part of the United States. The U. S. Department of Agriculture states . . . "Cypress trees not uncommonly attain an age of 1,000 years" . . . and that . . . "Florida probably contains about 50 per cent of the remaining stand of Cypress." The Cypress Knee grows up out of the ground from the root of the Cypress Tree. It grows naturally in a generally conical shape in a perpendicular direction from the ground and has some of the appearance of the trunk of a tree, but does not make a tree. It has no limbs nor leaves.

Unlike unusual rock and land formations which nature sculptures by action of the wind, rain, sun and accidents, the reverse is true in forming an unusual Cypress Knee. The Cypress Knee is a living thing and it fights back at the elements and accidents. A scar, instead of causing an indentation in the Knee, causes a layer of new growth to develop over the scar. Each scar lays a new foundation which has its effect on normal growth for the life of the Knee. Thereby the shape of the Cypress Knee records its history somewhat as a person records his past in his personality.

The above is my contribution to knowledge of this little known wood. I know this because I have carved down inside many Cypress Knees and have observed old scars and the wood that grew over them; also, I have Knees growing now in the swamps that I have scarred and rescarred every spring for many, many years. A young Knee will heal over a scar within a year. Some old Knees will not heal over in ten years.

Wall Vase
The flower vase as beautiful as the flowers.

THE bark is peeled off of some Knees, which pieces are described by the term "De Luxe." Some pieces are left natural with the bark on, termed "Rustic." When the bark is peeled from the Knee it is kept in the sunshine from three weeks to several months to dry and color. This sun treatment gives the peeled Knee a beautiful, bronze-like sun tan. Such a piece, properly waxed and rubbed, is rich in color, sheen and grain. Color of the De Luxe pieces ranges from a light maple to almost a deep red. The bark on the Rustic pieces varies greatly from a light grey to brown and in some instances the bark is a light red.

What is made out of the Cypress Knee depends altogether on the shapes discovered. Items made in the past may never be made again and what will be made in the future depends upon what is found. Some pieces sell for a few cents. I refused $1,000.00 for the unusual piece illustrated on the cover of this folder. Some pieces require only a few minutes work and some require several days actual work over a period of several years. In making anything out of the Cypress Knee, the natural shape is marred as little as possible. The Knee has to grow especially for the particular item to be made out of it. De Luxe items should be kept inside the house and cared for as any other piece of fine furniture. The Rustic items are suitable for interior or exterior use.

Some one has said "He who works with his hands is a laborer. He who works with his hands and his head is an artisan. But, he who works with his hands, his head, and his heart is an artist." I use all three and get a great deal of pleasure out of doing so. I do the best work I can, and that is the world's best, insofar as Cypress Knee work is concerned. My aim is not how fast, but how good. I use the best materials obtainable in making a finished product. To help illustrate the quality of work I do and my own particular ability, note picture on right of one of my intricate hand cravings from a single piece of wood. The only tool used was a pocket knife.

Note wood ball carved inside four posts which are carved inside diagonal piece. Space between ball and four posts is so close that a sheet of tissue placed between ball and posts will keep ball from rolling as piece is turned. This piece could be duplicated, but a Cypress Knee cannot be duplicated.

Rustic Bird House that lasts for years in the weather.

A Clock set in a Cypress Knee tells a story as well as the time.

PEOPLE who lack experience lack interest, and so it is with the Cypress Knee. A great deal happens to something that has lived a long time. The continual scarring and bruising by fires, floods, falling limbs, wild life and men for centuries and centuries, have caused some Cypress Knees to grow into shapes that will stagger the most elastic imagination. One's capacity to appreciate the unusual receives unending exercise and exhilaration in the presence of a collection of rare and beautiful Cypress Knees. Only a color photograph, or the actual sight of a piece can begin to convey the strange shapes, delicate coloring and grain of an outstanding specimen.

Many theories have been propounded as to the purpose of Cypress Knees. Some have theorized that Knees act as an anchorage for the Cypress Tree. Some suggest that the tree gets its air through the Knee during high water. But some trees have no Knees, and for long periods, all Knees belonging to the mother tree are entirely covered by water. Then too, trees breathe through their leaves. However, the water level does affect the height of the Cypress Knee. In declivities where the water is deep at times, the Knees grow correspondingly tall, and towards the edge of a swamp where the ground is higher, the Knees may be only a few inches high. The size of the Knee in circumference and height is also determined by the size of the tree, the size of the root from which it grows, and its age.

From the beginning of time up until a few years ago, the Cypress Knee was of no use to people. Sportsmen had admired them in the swamps, and bumped against them. A very few artistically-inclined people had collected them as they were. Making things out of the Cypress Knee is my original idea. I have designed and made many beautiful items from the Cypress Knee and because of the ingenious handcarved cavity in the Wall Vase, Bird House, Flower Fountain, and related items, in 1937, the United States Government granted me a seventeen year patent, No. 2069580, on these products.

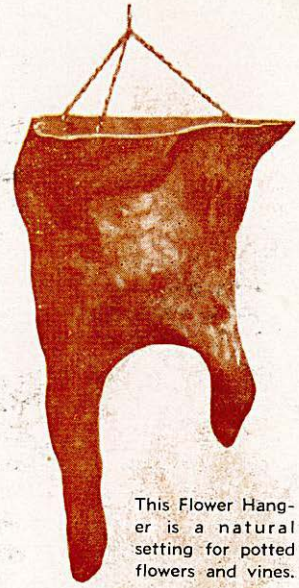
IN addition to such carvings, my home is covered with hand-hewed Cypress shingles and I personally made every one of them. I also made a baby bed and chairs of small Cypress Trees, have carved a stool and a canoe from a solid Cypress log. I put the same kind of careful skilled work and thought into every one of my Cypress Knee Products.

In spite of my patent and the skill and expensive equipment necessary to make quality Cypress Knee merchandise, probably five or six hundred people have attempted to imitate my products since 1934. That, of course, is a compliment, but at the same time a warning to those who do not know that many different grades of work can be done on a Cypress Knee as well as on anything else. Some one has said "He who follows another is always behind." This must be so, for people have sent me Cypress Knees to be reprocessed, which were bought from an imitator. My products have my name on them. My work is guaranteed to give satisfaction, or money refunded.

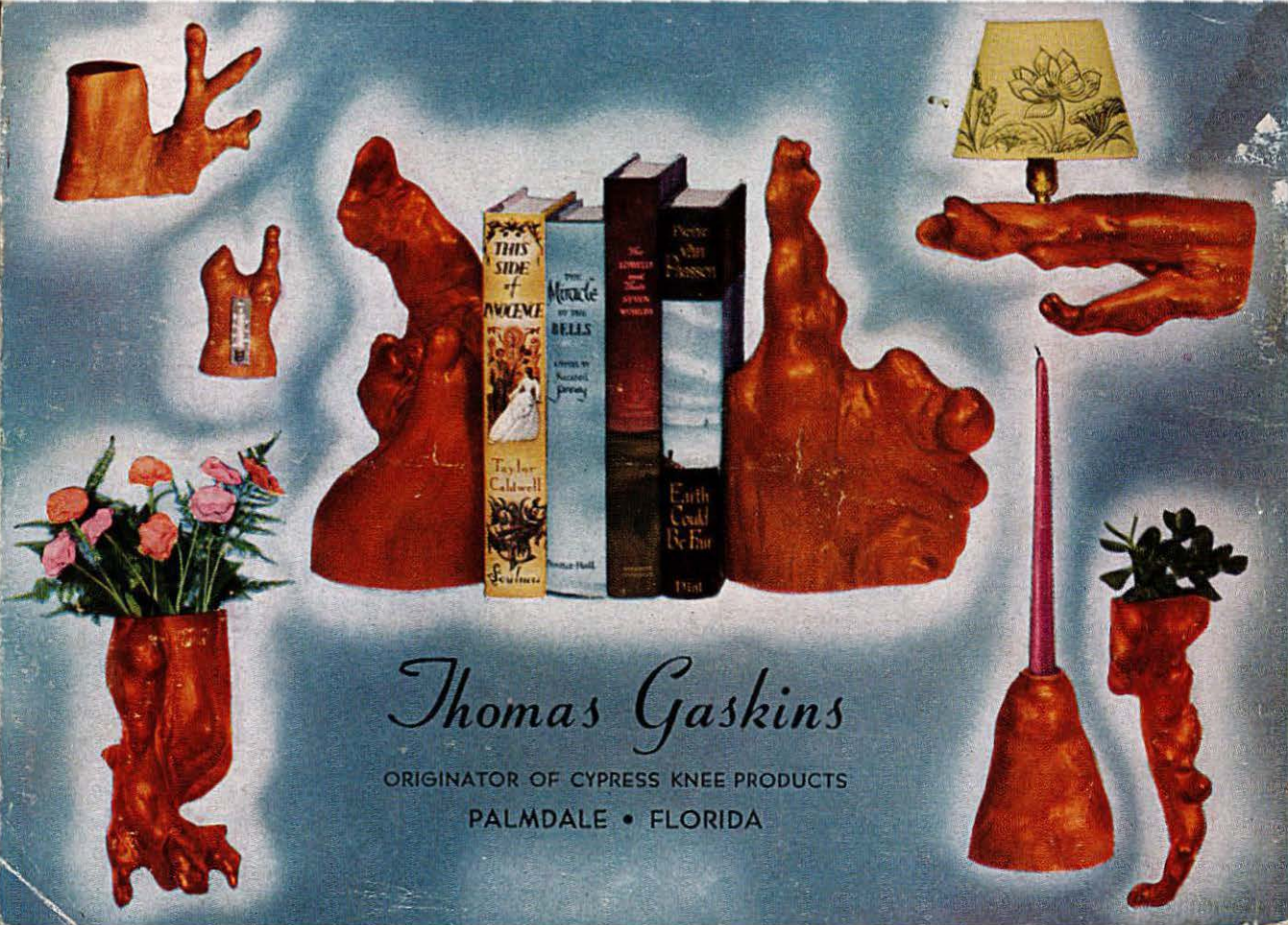
Some day I hope to sell you the particular Cypress Knee that fits your need or taste. One grew for you and I shall try to find it for you. From an educational standpoint alone, everyone who admires the beautiful should have at least one of these "Masterpieces of Nature." Better still, start a collection of rare Cypress Knee products. It will give a great deal of pleasure, your friends will admire it and it will be something that should grow in value as the years pass. Towards this end I offer my fullest cooperation.

Thomas Gaskins

"A Thing of Beauty is a Joy Forever"



This Flower Hanger is a natural setting for potted flowers and vines.



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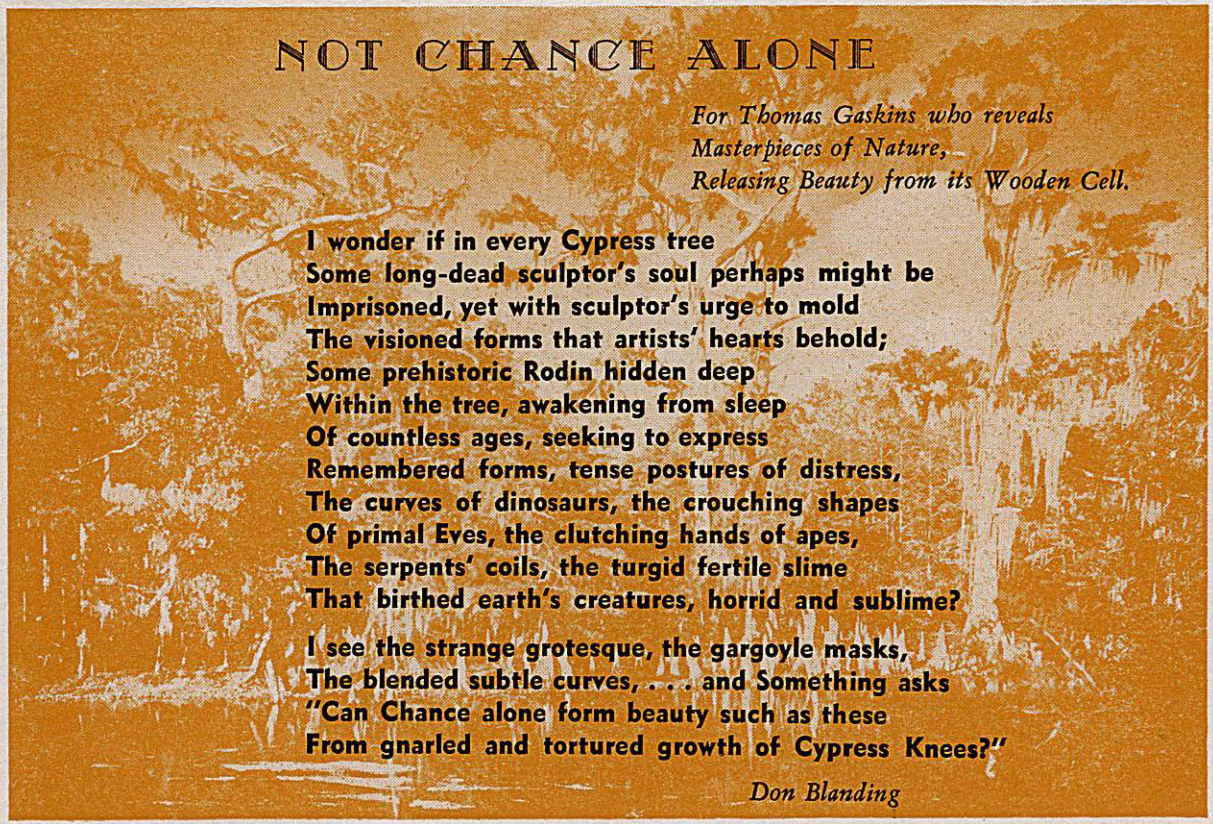

NOT CHANCE ALONE

For Thomas Gaskins who reveals
Masterpieces of Nature,
Releasing Beauty from its Wooden Cell.

I wonder if in every Cypress tree
Some long-dead sculptor's soul perhaps might be
Imprisoned, yet with sculptor's urge to mold
The visioned forms that artists' hearts behold;
Some prehistoric Rodin hidden deep
Within the tree, awakening from sleep
Of countless ages, seeking to express
Remembered forms, tense postures of distress,
The curves of dinosaurs, the crouching shapes
Of primal Eves, the clutching hands of apes,
The serpents' coils, the turgid fertile slime
That birthed earth's creatures, horrid and sublime?

I see the strange grotesque, the gargoyle masks,
The blended subtle curves, . . . and Something asks
"Can Chance alone form beauty such as these
From gnarled and tortured growth of Cypress Knees?"

Don Blanding